

Kafka, *a Seminar*.
DAVIDSON COLLEGE, FALL 2008.
(Mondays, 1:30-4:20 in Phi Hall 102.)

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Reading Kafka. This semester it will be our common project to read and to understand Franz Kafka, his writings, and his place and influence in literary and cultural history. Our theoretical approach is primarily that which German literary studies calls *textimmanent*, that is, an approach that values the text above the context, and especially close readings of the primary texts, not unlike the Anglo-American New Criticism, yet secondarily also that which nineteenth-century German literary scholars perfected, that is the study of *der Mensch und sein Werk*, the author and his oeuvre, or biographical criticism. In the case of Kafka these two approaches are nearly one and the same, since Kafka's writings include not only published literary works—stories, a few reviews and notes, a chapter from an unfinished novel—but also literary works unpublished during his lifetime (more stories and three novels), extensive personal diaries that include literary sketches and drafts, and a voluminous correspondence; we also have Kafka's official writings from his work as a lawyer. We'll read nearly all this and have a difficult time separating Kafka's life from Kafka's works, all of which is situated in the cultural hothouse of Jewish-German-Czech Prague in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Before each weekly meeting everyone will write a brief essay, as either proposition or a subsequent response. Everyone reads all of these.* We'll either draw straws or use some other method to divide the group randomly each week into small groups of three students. For the upcoming week two students in the small group will write brief essays (a page or two) on some aspect or selection of the assigned texts; the third student in the group will then respond to those essays (in a page or two). We meet Mondays, so the first essays are due Saturday evenings by 8pm. The response essays are due Sunday evenings by 8pm. All this writing always via email with documents attached in Word (doc not docx), always sent to the whole class and to me. Make a set of folders on your computer to keep everything organized week by week. It may also be useful to print all these essays and keep them in a folder or binder. (Everything always 10 point, double spaced, normal margins, no wacky fonts, name and date, title.) In class each Monday people present their proposition essays or responses briefly—we will all have read everything from everyone already—by way of introducing the discussion of the texts and your readings for that week. The groups will change each week, such that everyone will have written by about Thanksgiving ten or eleven brief essays, of which seven or eight will have been proposition essays and three or four response essays. In addition there is a final long paper.

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Texts

Picking editions for a Kafka course is a difficult matter, since there are many editions and translations. The old Willa and Edwin Muir translations so well known in English are slowly being replaced by new translations (like Mark Harmon's version of *The Castle*), but in general, English readers will find and use the Muirs' translations. These are available in all sorts of formats—trade paper, old Modern Library, various collections, on the web—but with the same text. So I think it's best for you to get your own editions. Try the used book stores you know, as well as Amazon, or the bookstore at the mall.

We'll read nearly everything (all available in various Schocken Books/Random House editions):

- the stories
Collected Stories
- the three novels
America (aka *Lost without a Trace*; aka *Amerika*)
The Trial
The Castle
- the diaries
The Diaries of Franz Kafka (incomplete, but ok)
- letters
Letters to Felice
Letters to Milena
Letters to Friends and Family

Those reading everything in German should get

- *Kritische Ausgabe. Schriften - Tagebücher. Kassette mit fünfzehn Bänden.* Herausgegeben von Jürgen Born, Gerhard Neumann, Malcolm Pasley und Jost Schillemeit. 15 Bände. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2002. ISBN: 3-596-15700-5. Einband: Paperback. 7328 Seiten. 125,00 Euro.
- *Briefe an die Eltern aus den Jahren 1922 – 1924.* Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1993. € 8,45. ISBN: 3-596-11323-7.
- *Briefe an Felice.* Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1976. € 14,90. ISBN: 3-596-21697-4.
- *Briefe an Milena.* Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1986. € 12,90. ISBN: 3-596-25307-1
- *Briefe an Ottla und die Familie.* Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1974. € 21,00. ISBN: 3-10-038115-7. (Diese Ausgabe ist leider vergriffen. Gebrauchte Exemplare sind per abebooks.com auffindbar oder man benutzt ein Bibliotheksexemplar.)
- Noch dazu sehr nützlich ist die Fischer Taschenbuch-Ausgabe der *Sämtlichen Erzählungen*

Those reading some things, but not all things, in German should get, in this order of importance and reading gusto:

- *Sämtliche Erzählungen*, Fischer tb; any edition
- *Das Schloß*; any edition
- *Der Proceß*; any edition
- *Amerika*, i.e. *Der Verschollene*; any edition

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Requirements, etc.

- Read—the schedule will have you doing most of the reading Tuesdays through Fridays. There is a pretty heavy reading load in this course, both in terms of amount and difficulty. On the other hand, it's nearly all Kafka, so after a few weeks you'll feel right at home with his prose.
- Write and talk = the eleven brief weekly essays and class presence and participation. Save all these papers from everyone in the seminar; you'll need them at the end.* Name your files with your name and the sequential number of the paper (Smith1.doc, Smith2.doc, etc.); always send .doc and not .docx format.
- Final paper (3000 – 4000 words; MLA or Chicago style).*
- Peer evaluation: I'll ask you to evaluate and rank your peers and yourself—for my eyes only. Note that all the written work in the course is read by everyone, so you'll have lots on which to base your evaluations.
- Grading: 1/2 brief essays & participation; 1/2 final paper.
- Honor code holds for all your work. You should discuss the course, your ideas, the readings, your essay and paper thoughts with your classmates, your apartment mates, your parents, your friends. Whenever you use someone else's words or ideas in any context, cite.
- No absences. (In case of illness, crisis, death etc. let me know before class; unexcused absences cost at least a letter grade each for the semester. For sports, field trips, or other qualified (so-called excused) potential absences we'll reschedule the class for that week, probably in the late evening or early morning. Please let me know right away about any qualified absences.)
- No late essays or papers, please. Late stuff will hurt the final grade.
- Coffee break each week.

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Kafka

Schedule

| week | date | readings | proposition essays [nn] | response essays [nn] | work due |
|------|----------------------|--|-------------------------|----------------------|---|
| 0 | 8/25 | I will not be at the meeting this week, though I would like to phone in to meet everyone; someone in the class please call me at 980-622-2617 at 2pm after you've discussed the introductory assignment (which will be on the table in the seminar room). | | | ➤introductions (virtual) |
| 1 | 9/1 (no mtg 8/25) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Vor dem Gesetz” “Before the Law” [Dec 1914] • selections from <i>Diaries</i> [8-19 Dec 1914, <i>KKATB</i> 706-10] (We'll read this out loud.) | none this week | none this week | ➤introductions (live); ➤write brief response in class |
| 2 | 9/8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Diaries 1. u 2. Heft</i>; = up to 26 Oct 1911 (ca. 200 pp) • “Gespräch mit dem Beter” “Conversation with the Suppliant” in “Beschreibungen eines Kampfes” “Description of a Struggle” • “Gespräch mit dem Betrunknen” “Conversation with the Drunk” in “Beschreibungen eines Kampfes” “Description of a Struggle” • “Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande” “Wedding Preparations in the Country” • “Berachtung,” “Meditation” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Kinder auf der Landstraße” “Children on a Country Road” ○ “Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers” “Unmasking a Confidence Trickster” ○ “Der plötzliche Spaziergang” “The Sudden Walk” ○ “Entschlüsse” “Resolutions” ○ “Der Ausflug ins Gebirge” “Excursion into the Mounatins” ○ “Das Unglück des Junggesellen” “Bachelors' Ill Luck” ○ “Der Kaufmann” “The Tradesman” ○ “Zerstreutes Hinausschauen” “Absent-minded Window Gazing” ○ “Der Nachhauseweg” “The Way Home” ○ “Die Vorüberlaufenden” “Passers-By” ○ “Der Fahrgast” “On the Train” ○ “Kleider” “Clothes” ○ “Die Abweisung” “Rejection” ○ “Zum Nachdenken für Herrenreiter” “Reflections for Gentlemen-Jockeys” ○ “Das Gassenfenster” “The Street Window” ○ “Wunsch, Indianer zu werden” “The Wish to Be a Red Indian” ○ “Die Bäume” “Trees” ○ “Unglücklichsein” “Unhappiness” • “Aeroplane in Brescia” “The Aeroplanes at Brescia” • selections (your choice) from <i>Briefe an Ottilia und die Familie</i> <i>Letters to Friends and Family</i> | | | ➤essays due Sat 8pm; ➤responses due Sun 8pm; <i>every week, via email attachment (Word or pdf) to everyone.</i> |
| 3 | 9/15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Diaries</i> up through 23 Sept 1912 • “Das Urteil” “The Judgment” • “Die Verwandlung” “The Metamorphosis” [“The Transformation”] • “Vor dem Gesetz” “Before the Law” • “Ein Traum” “A Dream” • “In der Strafkolonie” “In the Penal Colony” • <i>Briefe an Felice</i> <i>Letters to Felice</i> – first half, through 13 June 1913 | | | ➤essays due Sat 8pm; ➤responses due Sun 8pm; |

| week | date | readings | proposition essays [nn] | response essays [nn] | work due |
|------|-------|--|-------------------------|----------------------|---|
| 4 | 9/22 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Travel Diaries, Diaries to 1915</i> • <i>Der Verschollene</i> [aka <i>Amerika</i>] <i>Lost without a Trace</i> [aka <i>Amerika</i>] • <i>Briefe an Felice</i> <i>Letters to Felice</i> – second half | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ essays due Sat 8pm; ➤ responses due Sun 8pm; |
| 5 | 9/29 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Der Proceß</i> <i>The Trial</i> | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ essays due Sat 8pm; ➤ responses due Sun 8pm; |
| 6 | 10/6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Der Proceß</i> <i>The Trial</i> | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ essays due Sat 8pm; ➤ responses due Sun 8pm; |
| 7 | 10/13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no class Fall Break | | | |
| 8 | 10/20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Blumfeld, ein älterer Junggeselle” “Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor” • “Die Brücke” “The Bridge” • “Der Jäger Gracchus” “The Hunter Gracchus” • “Der Kübelreiter” “The Bucket Rider” • <i>Diaries 1915-21</i> | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ essays due Sat 8pm; ➤ responses due Sun 8pm; |
| 9 | 10/27 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Landarzt” “A Country Doctor” stories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Der neue Advokat” “The New Advocate” ○ “Ein Landarzt” “A Country Doctor” ○ “Auf der Galerie” “Up in the Gallery” ○ “Ein altes Blatt” “An Old Manuscript” ○ “Schakale und Araber” “Jackals and Arabs” ○ “Ein Besuch im Bergwerk” “A Visit to the Mine” ○ “Das nächste Dorf” “The Next Village” ○ “Eine kaiserliche Botschaft” “An Imperial Message” ○ “Die Sorge des Hausvaters” “The Cares of a Family Man” ○ “Elf Söhne” “Eleven Sons” ○ “Ein Brudermord” “A Fratricide” ○ “Ein Traum” “A Dream” • “Der Schlag ans Hoftor” “The Knock at the Manor Gate” • “Ein Bericht für eine Akademie” “A Report to an Academy” • “Brief an den Vater” “Letter to his Father” | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ essays due Sat 8pm; ➤ responses due Sun 8pm; |

| week | date | readings | proposition essays [nn] | response essays [nn] | work due |
|------|-------|---|-------------------------|----------------------|---|
| 10 | 11/3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Briefe an Milena</i> <i>Letters to Milena</i> • Late posthumously published stories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Der Nachbar” “The Neighbor” ○ “Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer” “The Great Wall of China” ○ “Eine alltägliche Verwirrung” “A Common Confusion” ○ “Die Wahrheit über Sancho Pansa” “The Truth About Sancho Pansa” ○ “Das Schweigen der Sirenen” “The Silence of the Sirens” ○ “Prometheus” “Prometheus” ○ “Heimkehr” “Homecoming” ○ “Das Stadtwappen” “The City Coat of Arms” ○ “Poseidon” “Poseidon” ○ “Gemeinschaft” “Fellowship” ○ “Nachts” “At Night” ○ “Die Abweisung” “The Refusal” ○ “Zur Frage der Gesetze” “The Problem of Our Laws” ○ “Die Truppenaushebung” “The Conscriptio of Troops” ○ “Die Prüfung” “The Test” ○ “Der Geier” “The Vulture” ○ “Der Steuerman” “The Helmsman” ○ “Der Kreisel” “The Top” ○ “Kleine Fabel” “A Little Fabel” ○ “Erstes Leid” “First Sorrow” | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ essays due Sat 8pm; ➤ responses due Sun 8pm; |
| 11 | 11/10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Das Schloß</i> <i>The Castle</i> – through “Olga’s Pläne” “Olga’s Plans” [through Kapitel 20 in the new revised edition in <i>Kritische Ausgabe</i>], | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ essays due Sat 8pm; ➤ responses due Sun 8pm; ➤ paper ideas (Sat 8 pm) |
| 12 | 11/17 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Das Schloß</i> <i>The Castle</i> – to the end • “Der Hungerkünstler” “The Hunger Artist” • “Gib’s auf!” “Give Up!” • “Von den Gleichnissen” “On Parables” • “Der Aufbruch” “The Departure” | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ essays due Sat 8pm; ➤ responses due Sun 8pm; ➤ paper topic incl. outline (Sat 8pm) |
| 13 | 11/24 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Diaries 1922—end</i> • “Eine kleine Frau” “A Little Woman” • “Forschungen eines Hundes” “Investigations of a Dog” • “Der Bau” “The Burrow” • “Josephine, die Sängerin, oder Das Volk der Mäuse” “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk” | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ essays due Sat 8pm; ➤ responses due Sun 8pm; ➤ paper intro, sketch, thesis, ca. 500 words (Sat 8pm) |
| 14 | 12/1 | brief class – writing week | | | |
| 15 | 12/8 | brief class – writing week | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ paper* (3000 – 4000 words) due to everyone via email attachment by Friday Dec 12, noon |

* For those of your working in German be sure in your papers to cite your quotations in German and English (or at least note the title, section, chapter, etc. of longer passages) such that readers in English can get your point.

| week | date | readings | proposition essays [nn] | response essays [nn] | work due |
|------|----------|---|-------------------------|----------------------|--|
| 16 | 12/15 | <p>last class (long, includes dinner)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read all the papers. Prepare one question for each paper. Bring to class all these prepared questions on one page; one copy for me. Each person presents 5-7 minutes, then we'll have 5-7 minutes Q&A from the prepared questions.) | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > paper presentations (15 min each) > in-class course evaluations |
| | by 12/17 | Peer evaluation via email to me only. | | | |

